

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VALLET 00226 250940Z

73

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SUBJECT: REVISED ELECTORAL DISTRICTS APPROVED BY
PARLIAMENT

1. ONE OF THE KEY PROCEDURAL STEPS REQUIRED BEFORE THE 1976 MALTESE GENERAL ELECTION CAN BE HELD WAS COMPLETED FEBRUARY 23, WHEN PRIME MINISTER MINTOFF JAMMED A BILL THROUGH PARLIAMENT TO REVISE THE OFFICIAL ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES. IN ADDITION TO GERRYMANDERING THE PREVIOUS TEN DISTRICTS INTO THIRTEEN NEW ONES, THE BILL ALSO OFFICIALLY ESTABLISHES THAT SIXTY-FIVE MEMBERS WILL BE ELECTED TO MALTA'S UNICAMERAL PARLIAMENT IN 1976 (FIVE FROM EACH OF THE THIRTEEN NEW DISTRICTS), COMPARED WITH THE PRESENT FIFTY-FIVE REPRESENTATIVES.

2. THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION (APPOINTED BY MINTOFF AND, LIKE MOST SUCH BODIES IN MALTA, SUBJECT TO HIS CONTROL) HAS BEEN STRUGGLING WITH THE BOUNDARY PROBLEM SINCE NOVEMBER 1975. THE MAJOR DIFFICULTY WAS BOTH A MATHEMATICAL AND A POLITICAL ONE. BY LAW, THE TOTAL NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN THE VARIOUS ELECTORAL DISTRICTS CANNOT VARY MORE THAN FIVE PERCENT. WITH A CURRENT VOTING REGISTER OF 210,000 PERSONS, IT WAS NECESSARY FOR THE COMMISSION (I.E., MINTOFF) TO DO

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PAGE 02 VALLET 00226 250940Z

SOME RATHER FANCY MAP DRAWING TO COMPLY WITH THIS

ASPECT OF THE LAW. THE ISLAND OF GOZO REMAINS A SINGLE DISTRICT (PLUS THE ADDITIONAL ISLET OF COMINO) WITH A TOTAL OF 16,380 VOTERS, WHICH IS JUST WITHIN THE ACCEPTABLE NUMERICAL RANGE (BETWEEN 15,300 AND 17,000). THIS LEFT THE JUGGLING TO THE OTHER TWELVE DISTRICTS ON THE MAJOR ISLAND OF MALTA.

3. THE POLITICAL PROBLEM FOR THE COMMISSION STEMMED FROM THE INTERNAL JOCKEYING FOR POSITION AMONG THE PRESENT LABOR PARTY PARLIAMENTARIANS (AND FUTURE LABOR CANDIDATES) FOR THE NEWLY-CARVED SLICES OF THE MALTESE PIE. THERE WERE BITTER BEHIND-THE SCENE ARGUMENTS AMONG THE LABORITES, AND AT LEAST TWO EARLIER PROPOSED BOUNDARY REVISION PLANS WERE SHOT DOWN DURING THE INTRAMURAL LABOR SQUABBLING, BEFORE THE FINAL VERSION WAS SUBMITTED TO PARLIAMENT (AND THE OPPOSITION NATIONALISTS) BY MINTOFF ON FEBRUARY 17.

4. THE NATIONALISTS WERE, OF COURSE, COMPLETELY IGNORED DURING THE LABORITE PIE-CUTTING CONTEST, AND THEY WERE FORCED TO LIVE WITH THE RESULTS. HOWEVER, THE NATIONALISTS PROFESS TO BE GENERALLY UNDISTURBED BY MINTOFF'S SHENANIGANS IN THIS CASE, AS THEY THINK THAT THE VARIOUS DISTRICT CHANGES WILL LARGEY CANCEL EACH OTHER OUT AND PROBABLY NOT GIVE THE LABOR PARTY THAT MUCH OF AN ADVANTAGE IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTION. WITH ALMOST 40,000 NEW REGISTERED VOTERS (ONLY 169,000 VOTED IN THE LAST GENERAL ELECTION IN 1971), THERE WILL BE SO MANY UNKNOWNS IN THIS YEAR'S ELCTION THAT THE NATIONALISTS COULD BE RIGHT IN DOWNGRADING THE BOUNDARY-JUGGLING EXERCISE.

5. IN ANY EVENT, MINTOFF GAVE THE NATIONALISTS ONLY ONE WEEK TO STUDY HIS PROPOSED CHANGES, AND THEN FORCED PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL IN A SINGLE SITTING AFTER ONLY A TWO HOUR DEBATE. FOR THE RECORD, THE NATIONALISTS OBJECTED TO THESE TACJCS, POINTING OUT THAT SUCH AN IMPORTANT DECISION SHOULD NOT BE MADE SO QUICKLY. BY COMPARISON, NATIONALIST LEADER
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PAGE 03 VALLET 00226 250940Z

BORG OLIVIER STATED THAT RECENTLY PARLIAMENT HAD SPENT SOME SEVEN WEEKS ARGUING ABOUT HOW DIRTY MALTA WAS (KWHEN CONSIDERING A "LITTER BILL"), AND HE THOUGHT THAT THE QUESTION OF ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES REQUIRED CAREFUL AND MORE EXTENSIVE CONSIDERATIONS. AS USUAL, MINTOFF BRUSHED ASIDE THE NATIONALIST OBJECTIONS, AND THE REVISED BOUNDARIES WERE ADOPTED BY PARLIAMENT ON A STRAIGHT-PARTY VOTE. (IN THE PAST, THE NATIONALISTS

ACTED IN EXACTLY THE SAME FASHION WHEN THEY CONTROLLED
EARLIER REDISTRICTING EXERCISES. THIS DOUBTLESS HELPS
TO EXPLAIN THE MILDNESS OF THEIR REACTION TO MINTOFF'S
TACTICS IN THIS CASE.)

6. THE NEW DISTRICTS, INCLUDING THE MAJOR TOWNS AND
VILLAGES IN EACH, AND THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF REGISTERED
VOTERS, ARE AS FOLLOWS:

(A) FIRST DISTRICT: VALLETTA, MARSA, PAOLA
(PARTIAL) -- 16,180 VOTERS;

(B) SECOND DISTRICT: COSPICUA, FGURA, KALKARA,
SENGLEA, VITTORIOSA, XGHAJRA -- 15,916 VOTERS;

(C) THIRD DISTRICT: MARSASCALA, MARSAXLOKK,
ZABBAR, ZEJTUN -- 15,878 VOTERS;

(D) FOURTH DISTRICT: GHAXAQ, GUDJA, PAOLA
(PARTIAL), SANTA LUCIA, TARXIEN -- 16,0047 VOTERS;

(E) FIFTH DISTRICT: BIRZEBBUGIA, KIRKOP, MQABBA,
QRENDI, SAFI, SIGGIEWI, ZURRIEQ -- 15,934 VOTERS;

(F) SIXTH DISTRICT: DINGLI, QORMI (PARTIAL),
ZEBBUG, RABAT (PARTIAL) -- 16,796;

(G) SEVENTH DISTRICT: FLORIANA, HAMRUN, LUQA,
QORMI (PARTIAL) -- 16,793 VOTERS;

(H) EIGHTH DISTRICT: BIRKIRKARA (PARTIAL), ST.
VENERA -- 15,484 VOTERS;

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PAGE 04 VALLET 00226 250940Z

(I) NINTH DISTRICT: GWARDAMANGIA, MSIDA,
SAN GWANN, ST. JULIAN'S, TA'XBIEX, BIRKIRKARA (PARTIAL)
-- 16,494 VOTERS;

(J) TENTH DISTRICT: GZIRA, SLIEMA -- 16,313
VOTERS;

(K) ELEVENTH DISTRICT: ATTARD, LIJA (PARTIAL),
MDINA, MELLIEHA, MGARR, RABAT (PARTIAL) -- 16,120 VOTERS;

(L) TWELFTH DISTRICT: BALZAN, BIRKIRKARA (PARTIAL),
GHARGHUR, MOSTA, NAXXAR, LIJA (PARTIAL), ST. PAUL'S BAY
-- 15,538 VOTERS;

(M) THIRTEENTH DISTRICT: GOZO, COMINO -- 16,380

VOTERS.

7. COMMENT: A REVISED ELECTORAL REGISTER WILL BE COMPILED IN APRIL, WHICH WILL CHANGE THESE ESTIMATED VOTING TOTALS SLIGHTLY BUT WILL NOT SIGNIFICANTLY ALTER THE IMPACT OF THE NEW ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES. BOTH PARTIES ARE NOW URGING THEIR SUPPORTERS TO BE READY FOR AN ELECTION IN THE NEAR FUTURE, AND TO BE CERTAIN THAT THEY ARE QUALIFIED TO CAST THEIR BALLOTS. CONSIDERING THE FACT THAT EACH MEMBER OF THE NEW 65-SEAT PARLIAMENT WILL REPRESENT AN AVERAGE OF ONLY 3,300 VOTERS, THE OLD ADAGE THAT "EVERY VOTE COUNTS" CERTAINLY WILL APPLY TO THE 1976 ELECTIONS, PARTICULARLY UNDER MALTA'S PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SYSTEM. SMITH

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